

Jilly Cooper is a journalist, writer and media superstar. The author of many number one bestselling novels, including *Riders*, *Rivals*, *Polo*, *The Man Who Made Husbands Jealous*, *Appassionata*, *Score!*, *Pandora* and *Wicked!*, she lives in Gloucestershire with her husband, Leo, her rescue greyhound, Feather, and five cats. She was appointed OBE in the 2004 Queen's Birthday Honours List for her contribution to literature.

Find out more about Jilly Cooper and her novels by visiting her website: www.jillycooper.co.uk

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THE MAN WHO MADE HUSBANDS JEALOUS

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The prose fizzes with pun, wit and orgasmic dalliance’

She

‘Jilly’s lusty tales are such a thumping – or should I say humping – good read that you keep turning the pages until you have raced to the end of the last racy chapter . . . unputdownable’

Jane Ducas, *Woman’s Journal*

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The Times

‘Wonderful array of characters ... Jilly’s best hero yet ... the action is the hottest Jilly has yet produced ... the whole thing is vintage Cooper, full of the romping humour and spot-on observations”

Katy Bravery, *Today*

‘A new Jilly Cooper novel always produces mixed emotions in our family. Excitement and anticipation from me and gloom and despair from my husband, our three children and the guinea pig who know they will be ignored and neglected for however long it will take me to read. The Man Who Made Husbands Jealous proved no exception. There has been no hot food in our house and precious little conversation for the last three days’

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‘Jilly Cooper rides again, with her raunchiest novel yet’

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‘addictive’

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‘Cooper’s touch is supreme ... The Tolstoy of the shires has done it again’

Midweek

By Jilly Cooper

FICTION

Wicked!
Pandora
The Rutshire Chronicles:
Riders
Rivals
Polo
The Man Who Made Husbands
Jealous
Appassionata
Score!

NON-FICTION

Animals in War
Class
How to Survive Christmas
Hotfoot to Zabriskie Point (with
Patrick Lichfield)
Intelligent and Loyal
Jolly Marsupial
Jolly Super
Jolly Superlative
Jolly Super Too
Super Cooper
Super Jilly
Super Men and Super Women
The Common Years
Turn Right at the Spotted Dog
Work and Wedlock
Angels Rush In
Araminta's Wedding

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Little Mabel
Little Mabel's Great Escape
Little Mabel Saves the Day
Little Mabel Wins

ROMANCE

Bella
Emily
Harriet
Imogen
Lisa & Co
Octavia
Prudence

ANTHOLOGIES

The British in Love
Violets and Vinegar

THE MAN WHO MADE HUSBANDS JEALOUS

Jilly Cooper



CORGI BOOKS

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To Emily
with love and gratitude
for so much happiness

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I should also like to thank the National Canine Defence League and in particular Mrs Clarissa Baldwin for allowing me to use their slogan – ‘A Dog is for Life . . . Not Just for Christmas’.

The subconscious mind works in strange ways. Almost from conception, *The Man Who Made Husbands Jealous* was set in Paradise, a mythical village in the mythical county of Rutshire. Paradise Village in the book has a population of around eight hundred, an Anglo-Saxon church, a pub, a restaurant, a handful of shops and lies on a river at the bottom of a beautiful valley surrounded by steeply sloping woodland studded with beautiful houses.

During a driving lesson, when the book was well under way, I told my instructor, Peter Clarkson, about my fictional village. Did I know there was a Paradise in Gloucestershire, he asked, and promptly drove me to a tiny hamlet which looked down into a valley, even more beautiful than the one of my imagination. Charles II is alleged to have named the place Paradise. Arriving by

night while escaping from the Roundheads, he gazed out of the window the following morning and asked in rapture if he had arrived in Paradise. As I had written so much of the book by then, and because the two 'Paradises' are totally different, except in their rare beauty, I decided to keep the name, but would stress that no-one living nor any of the locations in Paradise, Rutshire, bear any resemblance or are based on anyone living or any of the places in Paradise, Gloucestershire.

I must also reiterate that *The Man Who Made Husbands Jealous* is a work of fiction and none of the characters is based on anyone. Any resemblance to any living person is purely coincidental and wholly unintended.

An author is only as good as her publishers. Mine have been magnificent. I would like to say a massive thank you to Paul Scherer, Mark Barty-King, Patrick Janson-Smith, of Transworld Publishers Ltd., and all their staff for their continued encouragement and advice while I was writing the book. Once it was delivered I had marvellous editorial advice from Diane Pearson, Broo Doherty and Tom Hartman. Nor could anyone have a more charming, merry or skilful agent than Desmond Elliott. I also owe a special debt of gratitude to my son Felix, who in January 1992 restored the gazebo at the bottom of the garden so I was able to write in blissful seclusion uninterrupted by doorbells or telephones.

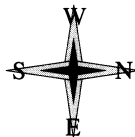
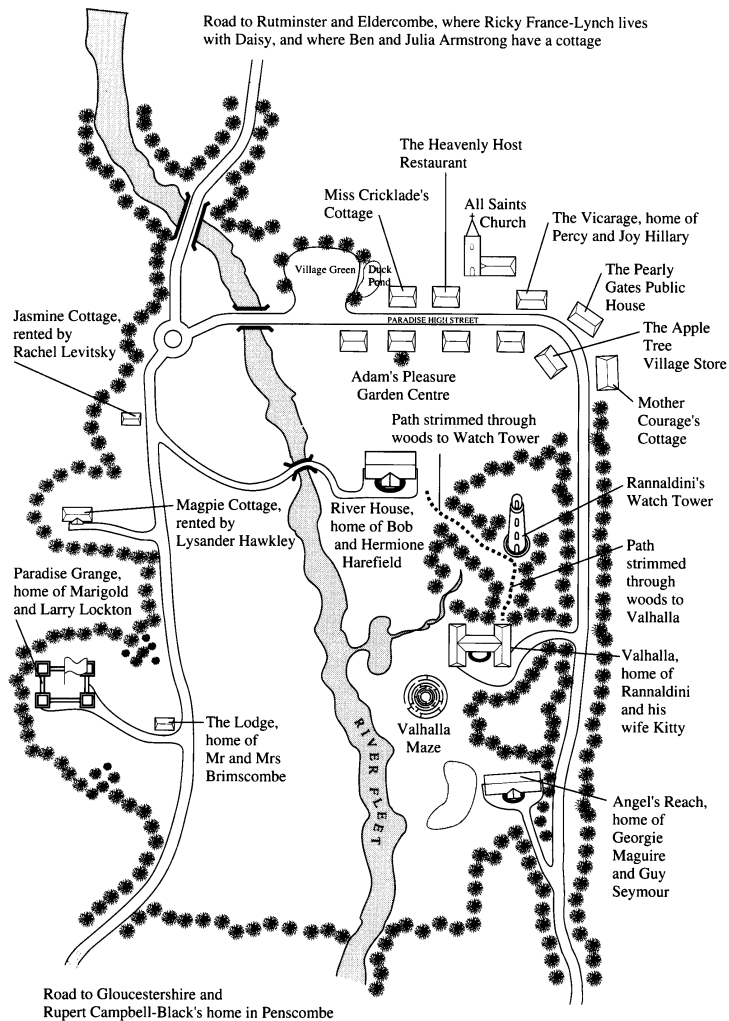
Finishing a big book is tremendously exciting and consequently I owe a further huge debt of gratitude to my friends Annette Xuereb-Brennan, Annalise Dobson, Anna Gibbs-Kennet and Marjorie Williams for entering into the spirit by working late into the night typing huge chunks of the manuscript, and often correcting factual mistakes and fearful spelling. Ann Mills was equally marvellous at clearing up after us all without throwing away any vital scribbling.

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funny lines and spent hours collating and photostating the manuscript.

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THE VALLEY OF PARADISE IN THE COUNTY OF RUTSHIRE



CHARACTERS

EDWARD BARTHOLOMEW ALDERTON	A significant grandchild.
ARCHANGEL MIKE	Landlord of The Pearly Gates Public House and captain of Paradise Cricket XI.
JULIA ARMSTRONG BEN ARMSTRONG	A passionate painter. Her husband – a caring beard in computers.
ASTRID MISS BATES	A comely Palm Beach groom. A temp with tempting ankles.
BEATRICE	A fair flautist misused by Rannaldini.
JAMES BENSON	A very smooth private doctor.
BONNY SABINE BOTTOMLEY	A Palm Beach polo groupie. Headmistress of Bagley Hall – a less caring beard.
TEDDY BRIMSCOMBE MRS BRIMSCOMBE	Larry Lockton's gardener. His wife.
BUNNY RUPERT CAMPBELL-BLACK	An ace Gloucestershire vet. Multi-millionaire owner/ trainer, ex-world show-jumping champion, Mecca for most women.
TAGGIE CAMPBELL-BLACK	His second wife – an angel.
MARCUS CAMPBELL-BLACK	His son – an embryo concert pianist.
TABITHA CAMPBELL-BLACK	His daughter – a teenage tearaway.

SEB AND DOMMIE CARLISLE	The heavenly twins. Vastly brave professional polo players, whose serious wildness has been tempered by the recession.
CHLOE CATFORD	Talented mezzo-soprano and Boris Levitsky's mistress.
BLUEY CHARTERIS	Rupert Campbell-Black's first jockey.
LADY CHISLEDEN	An old boot and a pillar of Paradise.
CLIVE	Rannaldini's sinister black-leather-clad henchman.
MRS COLMAN	David Hawkley's secretary – nicknamed 'Mustard' by the boys because she's so keen on him.
CAMERON COOK	A talented television termagent.
MISS CRICKLADE	Winner of the home-made wine class at Paradise Church fête for ten years running.
DANNY	One of Rupert Campbell-Black's stable lads.
DIZZY	Rupert Campbell-Black's head groom. A glamorous divorcée.
FERDINAND FITZGERALD	Fat Ferdie. Lysander Hawkley's best friend and minder. Estate agent and fixer who is riding the recession with a cowboy's skill.
RICKY FRANCE-LYNCH	Polo captain of England.
DAISY FRANCE-LYNCH	His painter wife, a friend of Julia Armstrong.
GERALDINE	Guy Seymour's London secretary.
GRAYDON GLUCKSTEIN	Chairman of the New World Philharmonic Orchestra.
HELEN GORDON	Rupert Cambell-Black's first wife.
BOB HAREFIELD	Orchestra manager of the London Met. A saint.

HERMIONE HAREFIELD	His seriously tiresome wife. Rannaldini's mistress. One of the world's leading sopranos and an applause junkie.
LITTLE COSMO HAREFIELD	A four-year-old fiend.
LYSANDER HAWKLEY	A hero of our time.
DAVID 'HATCHET' HAWKLEY	Lysander's father and an unmerry widower. Headmaster of Fleetley – a top English public school.
DINAH HAWKLEY	An old soak, and the widow of David Hawkley's much older brother, Alastair.
HEINZ	A colourless assistant conductor at the London Met.
THE REVEREND PERCIVAL HILLARY	A portly parson who confines his pastoral visits to drinks time.
JOY HILLARY	His wife. A bossy boots.
BEATTIE JOHNSON	A seductive, totally unprincipled journalist.
FREDDIE JONES	Electronics supremo and director of Venturer Television.
BORIS LEVITSKY	A glamorous, temperamental composer who defected from Russia in the eighties. Assistant conductor at the London Met and lover of red wine, red meat and red-blooded women.
RACHEL LEVITSKY	His English wife. A concert pianist who has sacrificed her career to bring up two children: Vanya and Masha. Performs under her maiden name, Rachel Grant.
LARRY LOCKTON	Chief Executive of Catchitune Records and a rough diamond.

MARIGOLD LOCKTON	His once-ravishing wife, who is finding to her cost that rough diamonds are not for ever.
ISAAC LOVELL	A brilliant jump jockey.
SHERRY MACARTHY	A ravishing neglected American wife.
GEORGIE MAGUIRE	A sixties singer/songwriter and sex symbol. Slightly long-in-the-capped tooth, but poised for a massive come-back.
DANCER MAITLAND	A rock star.
MARCIA MELLING	A susceptible divorcée, one of Rupert Campbell-Black's owners.
OSWALDO	A colourful guest conductor of the London Met.
MR PANDOPOULOS	Another of Rupert Campbell-Black's owners.
MRS PIGGOTT	Georgie Maguire's daily. Nicknamed Mother Courage because of her fondness for a pint of beer.
ROBERTO RANNALDINI	One of the world's greatest conductors. Musical director of the London Met and a very evil genius.
KITTY RANNALDINI	His much younger third wife who runs his life like clockwork.
WOLFGANG RANNALDINI	Rannaldini's son from his first marriage, a good sort.
NATASHA RANNALDINI	Rannaldini's daughter from his second marriage: a handful in all senses of the word.
CECILIA RANNALDINI	Rannaldini's second wife and a world famous diva. Given to throwing plates and tantrums.

GUY SEYMOUR	A bishop's son and Georgie Maguire's very decent and rather unlikely husband. Owner of London art gallery and nurser of talent.
FLORA SEYMOUR	Guy's and Georgie's wild child.
MEREDITH WHALEN	A highly expensive gay interior designer, known as the Ideal Homo because he's always being asked as a spare man for deserted wives at Paradise dinner parties.
ELMER WINTERTON	American Security billionaire. Chief executive of Safus Houses Inc. and a philandering Palm Beach polo patron.
MARTHA WINTERTON	His ravishing neglected second wife.

I

Lysander Hawkley appeared to have everything. At twenty-two, he was tall, broad-shouldered, heart-stoppingly handsome, wildly affectionate, with a wall-to-wall smile that withered women. In January 1990 at the finals of a Palm Beach polo tournament, this hero of our time was lying slumped on a Prussian-blue rug in the pony lines sleeping off the excesses of the night before.

The higher the standard of polo the better looking tend to be both grooms and ponies. On this punishingly hot, muggy day, all around Lysander beautiful girls in Prussian-blue shirts and baseball caps were engaged in the frantic activity of getting twenty-four ponies ready for the match. But, trying not to wake him, they swore under their breaths as they bandaged and tacked-up charges driven demented by an invasion of mosquitoes. And, if they could, these beautiful girls would have hushed the thunder that grumbled irritably along the flat, palm-tree fringed horizon.

But Lysander didn't stir – not even when an Argentine groom working for the opposition jumped a pony clean over him on the way to the warm-up area, nor when two of his team mates, the Carlisle twins, Sebastian and Dominic, roared up in a dark green Aston Martin yelling in rage and relief that they'd finally tracked him down.

People loved doing things for Lysander. The grooms had kept their voices down. In the same way Seb and Dommie, both England polo internationals, had persuaded Elmer Winterton, the security billionaire who employed them for the Palm Beach season, to fly Lysander out as a

substitute when the fourth member of the team had broken his shoulder in the semi-finals.

'The little fucker,' howled Seb, leaping out of the car, 'after all the trouble we took getting him the job.'

'He rewards us by getting rat-assed,' said Dommie.

Together they gazed indignantly down at Lysander, sprawled lean-hipped and loose-limbed as a lurcher puppy. Lazily he stretched out and raked a mosquito bite in his sleep.

'No-one looking at that angelic inertia,' went on Dommie grimly, 'could imagine his ability for wanton destruction when he's awake.'

'Well, if he channels some of that ability against the opposition we'll be OK,' said Seb, and, picking up a Prussian-blue bucket, he dashed the contents into Lysander's face. 'Come on, Mr Hawkley. This is your wake-up call.'

'What the fuck?' Leaping as though he'd been electrocuted, frantically wiping dirty water out of his eyes, Lysander slowly and painfully focused on two, round, ruffian faces and four dissipated blue eyes glaring down at him from under thick blond fringes.

'Oh, it's you two,' he groaned. 'For a terrible moment I thought I was seeing double. What the hell are you trying to do to me?'

'Nothing to what you're doing to yourself,' said Seb briskly. 'Game starts in half an hour. Get your ass into gear.'

'Did you pull that blonde?' asked Dommie, unbuttoning his grey-striped shirt and selecting a Prussian-blue polo shirt from the back of the Aston Martin.

'I'm not sure,' Lysander's wonderfully smooth, wide forehead wrinkled for a second. 'I went back to her place, certainly, but I've got a terrible feeling I fell asleep on the job. I'd better ring and apologize.'

'Later.' Seb chuckled him a polo shirt.

'I bloody can't,' complained Lysander, taking a sodden piece of paper from his shirt pocket. 'She gave me her

number but the ink's run. I'd like a tan like that,' he added, admiring Dommie's solidly muscled conker-brown back.

'Well, you won't get one unless you play bloody well this afternoon,' said Seb, stepping out of his jeans. 'Elmer's threatening to send you home on the next plane. The fax in the barn is for business use only. Elmer is desperate for details of some massive Jap deal, and all morning the machine has been spewing out the racing pages of every English newspaper.'

'Oh, great! They've arrived.' Leaping to his feet, Lysander tore off his shirt without bothering to undo any buttons. 'If I get changed quickly, I can have a bet. If Elmer won't let me use the telephone in the barn, can I borrow yours?'

'No, you cannot!' Grabbing Lysander's arm, Seb yanked him back. 'Bloody get dressed and warmed up. We didn't bring you all the way from Fulham to make fools of us.'

'Foolham,' said Lysander. For a moment, his head went back and his big mouth stretched in a roar of laughter showing off wonderfully even teeth. Then he looked perplexed.

'Now, where did I leave my polo gear?'

The opposition team, who were called 'Mr Beefy', consisted of a fast-food tycoon, Butch Murdoch, a good consistent player, and his three Argentine professionals, one of whom, Juan O'Brien, was the greatest player in the world. Wearing red shirts, they were already hitting balls across a field which rippled beneath its heat haze like a vast green lake. A red mobile canteen was handing out free hamburgers to Mr Beefy supporters. Inhaling a waft of frying onions, as he and the twins rode onto the field, Lysander retched and clamped his mouth shut. Unable to find his kit, he was wearing boots that wouldn't zip up, borrowed knee-pads and a too-large hat which kept falling over his perfect nose and which did nothing to deflect a white-hot sun from his murderous headache.

An utterly instinctive horseman, Lysander's polo career had been held back in the past by his ability to be distracted during matches.

'Oh wow, oh wow,' he was now muttering as he took in the glamorous, gold-limbed female supporters, crowding the stands and lolling on the burning bonnets of the Cadillacs and Lincolns lining the field.

'God, I've got a hangover. This horse is *so* over the top,' he grumbled, trying to stop a madly excited chestnut mare taking off as Butch Murdoch's private ambulance manned by an army of paramedics, stormed past to take up position at mid-field.

'Kerr-ist!' Lysander nearly lost his hat as he swung round. 'Look at the legs on that brunette in the pink skirt.'

'More to the point,' Seb lowered his voice, 'see that man in the panama in the second row of the stands. He's an England selector flown specially over to watch you.'

'Really!' Lysander's blue-green eyes widened in wonder.

'So get your finger out.'

'You bet!' Squeezing the chestnut, Lysander galloped off in a cloud of dust, tapping a practice ball effortlessly ahead of him.

'That's not true,' said Dommie who had slightly more principles than Seb.

'Of course it's not,' said Seb. 'But it might take his mind off fieldside crumpet!'

The twins were basically amused by Lysander's antics. In their youth, when they had made more money ripping off rich patrons than by their polo skills, their own wildness had been legendary. But the chill hand of the recession was making patrons more parsimonious and hot horse deals less easy and, as Elmer Winterton paid them a long salary and picked up their expenses, it was very much in their interest that Lysander distinguished himself that afternoon.

And here at last, trailing security guards, and perennially late because he liked to give the impression of being

delayed by matters of state, came Elmer Winterton. He was followed by a private ambulance even larger than Mr Beefy's and manned by more paramedics.

Elmer's company, Safus, not only produced the Safus House which was allegedly so well secured that no intruder could break in, but also specialized in screening high-risk computers for the American government and industry. Elmer could frequently be heard boasting that only he knew the passwords to the nation's most crucial secrets.

Having flown several senators and their wives down from Washington by private jet to watch him play, he was desperate that his team should win the cup under the Prussian-blue Safus colours.

Dark, swarthy, squat, with eyebrows that without ferocious plucking would have met in the middle, Elmer had mean, small eyes and a long nose that jerked up at the end like a white rhinoceros. He also displayed the rhino's erratic belligerence and was so unable to control his overbred ponies that he was as likely to crash into his own side as the opposition.

It would be hard to have been uglier or a worse rider than Elmer, as he lumbered on to the field intolerably pounding the kidneys of his delicate dapple-grey pony, but such were his power and riches that the gold-limbed girl groupies licked their lips and rolled their shorts up an inch or two higher as he passed.

The heat was stifling. To the west, sinister black clouds advanced like a procession of Benedictine monks. Shaggy palm trees quivered with stillness above the mushroom-brown houses that flanked the outfield. As sweating ponies lined up and the umpire chunked the ball into a shifting forest of legs, Lysander could be heard saying, 'I wonder if Elmer's paramedics have got any Fernet-Branca.'

By half-time, Safus was trailing 2-8 and Lysander was dying of shame. Not having played since last summer, he was scuppered by hangover and the cauldron heat of Palm Beach after a freezing English winter. Unused

to such fast well-bred ponies or such hard dry ground, he had had a terrible three chukkas. Mr Beefy's three Argentine hired assassins hadn't allowed him near the ball. Nor were matters helped by Elmer barging around like some geriatric in an ancient Mini, who keeps pulling in front of faster drivers on the motorway. Of the eight goals scored by Mr Beefy, six had been penalties awarded against Elmer. Elmer was also aware that a photographer, hired by the Safus PR Department, was videoing the entire game to show at the sales conference next month and he hadn't touched the ball once.

'I pay for this fucking team,' he was now yelling at Seb and Dommie in the pony lines, 'and I'm going to fucking well hit the fucking ball as much as I fucking well like, and as for him,' he stabbed a stubby finger at a cringing Lysander, 'hired assassin indeed. Hired asshole more likely, that son of a bitch couldn't assassinate a fly.'

Matching Elmer's mood, the black clouds now hovered above the pony lines like a vast impenetrable yew hedge. Lysander's eyes and throat were lined with dust. He'd towelled off a bucket of sweat as he came off the field, and now he was wringing wet again.

Comfort, however, was at hand from a honey-blond groom called Astrid.

'Don't listen to Elmer,' she told Lysander, 'and don't be fooled by this mare. She doesn't have brakes, but she sure is fast,' she added as she pulled down the stirrups of a mean-looking yellow pony, whose coat quivered irritably against the flies.

'What's she called?' Lysander asked listlessly as he put his foot in the stirrup.

'Mrs Ex, after Elmer's ex-wife,' said Astrid, jumping to avoid the mare's darting teeth, 'because she's always bombing around causing trouble.'

'Surprised he got anyone to marry him,' shuddered Lysander, gathering up his reins and his stick.

In defence of her master Mrs Ex put in a terrific buck. Next moment Lysander was sitting on the ground.

‘See what I mean,’ bellowed Elmer, ‘that asshole can’t even stay on a fucking horse. Get the paramedic. He’ll certify the guy injured and we can put in a sub.’

But the fall had sobered Lysander. Vaulting on to Mrs Ex, he galloped back into the fray. In the fourth chukka, Dommie and Seb both scored twice, and Lysander once. Then Mr Beefy’s Argentines rallied and Lysander was so transfixed with admiration for Juan O’Brien’s forehand pass that he completely forgot to mark the number two player to whom Juan was passing.

‘Take the bloody man, Lysander,’ screamed Dommie. But he was too late, the number two had scored.

Three minutes later to placate Elmer, who was belly-aching about being the only member of the Safus team not to have scored, Dommie dropped a ball a foot in front of him and bang in front of the goal.

‘Take your time, Elmer,’ he shouted, galloping upfield in support.

‘Elmer Winterton is looking awful good,’ said the commentator.

Elmer took a swipe, missed, and, losing his temper, started to beat his pony.

‘Hi,’ yelled Lysander, thundering across the field, ‘that is absolutely not on.’

‘It absolutely isn’t on, is it, you little fuckwit.’ Elmer mimicked Lysander’s English accent. ‘I can hit anything I want,’ and raising his stick he took a furious swipe at Lysander who promptly lifted his stick in retaliation.

‘Stop it,’ roared Seb.

Fortunately, like a bucket of water over a dogfight, the dense black cloud keeled over in a tidal wave. Like cats, the spectators shot into their cars. Most of the players, particularly the Argentines, who detested rain, would have followed suit. But Lysander felt only blessed relief. For the first time in forty-eight hours he was cool and he was utterly used to playing in the rain.

‘Lysander Hawkley is looking awful good,’ crackled the loudspeaker a minute later. ‘He’s got the line and he’s

really motoring on Elmer Winterton's yellow pony. Oh, where are you going, Lysander?'

Shying at one of Mr Beefy's white-and-red paper napkins which had blown on to the field, Mrs Ex had taken off through the downpour carting Lysander, who was whooping with laughter, past Elmer's and Mr Beefy's ambulances, beyond the goal posts and goal judge off into the Everglades. Three minutes later, he cantered back, still roaring his head off.

'When a horse takes off, there's not much you can do. The only thing that stopped Mrs Ex was a huge croc on the river bank. I thought it was one of your security guards. Sir,' he added hastily seeing the sudden fury in Elmer's beady little eyes.

Fortunately Mrs Ex's turn of speed proved more effective going the other way. Hanging on Lysander's hands like an express train, she whisked him past three outraged Argentines, which enabled him to lean right out of the saddle and flick the ball between the red-and-white posts with a glorious, offside cut shot.

As the bell went for the end of the fifth chukka the crowd hooted approval from the inside of their cars. Riding back to the pony lines through the deluge Lysander noticed a lone spectator huddling in the stands beneath the totally inadequate protection of a Prussian-blue Safus umbrella. Catching a glimpse of long brown legs Lysander recognized the brunette in the pink skirt he'd admired earlier. Returning for the last chukka, he carried a spare blue rug which had kept dry in Elmer's trailer.

'Oh, how darling of you,' said the brunette as he jumped off and spread it over her legs.

Her hair, the rich brown of soy sauce, fell in dripping rats' tails. The rain intensified the dark freckles that polka-dotted her thin face and arms. She was shivering like a dog in a vet's waiting room.

'You should be inside your car,' reproved Lysander.

'My husband likes to know where I am, in case he breaks a mallet.' The girl pointed to three spare polo

sticks propped against the low white fence in front of her.

'Lucky bloke,' sighed Lysander.

'Lysander,' called Seb sharply.

Glancing round, Lysander saw the other players were already lined up for the throw-in and galloped over to join them.

'Don't chat up girls in the middle of a game,' said Seb in a furious undertone, 'particularly when they're the patron's wife.'

'She's married to Elmer?' asked Lysander, appalled.

'Yup, and unless we win, he'll take it out on her afterwards.'

In the last chukka, with Mr Beefy only one goal ahead, the tension got to both sides. Then Juan O'Brien swore so badly at the umpire for ignoring one of Elmer's more blatant fouls that the umpire retaliated by awarding a penalty against Juan.

As Seb took the hit for Safus, Lysander belted back to the pony lines to change horses and have another look at Elmer's wife. The way her white silk shirt was clinging to her body was nothing short of spectacular. How could she have married such an ape?

While Seb circled his pony then clouted the ball between the posts, Juan O'Brien came off the back line and blocked the shot with his pony's shoulder. Lysander winced. He'd seen players stop goals with their pony's heads. Enraged, he galloped upfield, picked up the ball, played cat and mouse with it, hit it in the air, before slamming it between the posts. The spectators honked their horns in ecstasy.

The storm had passed. Ponies steamed. Bits, stirrups and the huge silver cup on its red tablecloth glittered in the returning sun.

'I guess Safus is going to stage a come-back situation,' said the commentator.

Juan O'Brien guessed otherwise. In the closing seconds of the game he roared downfield, black curls streaming under his hat, swinging his stick, driving the ball

gloriously before him, then, unmarked and overconfident, just in front of goal he hit wide.

Pouncing, Lysander backed the ball upfield to Seb who passed to Dommie, who carried on through the puddles until he encountered a wall of Argentine resistance and hastily cut the ball to a furiously racing-up Lysander, who met it gloriously. With twenty seconds on the clock, Lysander was perfectly poised to score the winning goal but, seeing Elmer scowling red-faced in front of the posts, and remembering Elmer's drenched wife, who would get hell after the game, he passed instead to Elmer. The twins groaned in disbelief, but, by some miracle, on the bell Elmer managed to coax the ball between the posts.

All Elmer's senators, flown down by private jet, who'd been wondering what the hell to say to him after the game, cheered with deafening relief. The company cameraman decided not to shoot himself after all. At last he had a clip he could show at the sales conference and later he was able to film Elmer brandishing the huge silver cup while his beautiful wife clapped so enthusiastically that she spilled champagne down her pink skirt.

Back at Elmer's barn, Lysander, having drunk a great deal of Moët from the cup, hazily checked the legs of his ponies, thanking them profusely as he plied them with Polo mints. He then thanked the grooms with equal enthusiasm and passed round the individual magnum of Moët he'd been given as a member of the winning team.

'You're certainly flavour of the month,' said Astrid. 'Elmer reckons you're the best Brit he's ever played with. He wants you to stay on for the Rolex next month.'

In moments of excitement Lysander could do little more than open and shut his mouth.

'Really?' he gasped finally.

'Really!' Pretending to buckle under the weight, Astrid handed him a sheaf of faxes. 'Here are your racing pages.'

'I'd forgotten those!' Lysander gave a whoop of joy. 'Now I can have a bet.'

‘No you can’t!’ Seb marched in, already changed, with his hair slicked back from the shower. ‘It’s nearly midnight in England and the only thing racing at the moment is the very unblue blood through Elmer’s veins. In between copies of *Sporting Life* the fax managed to spew out confirmation of his Jap deal. Elmer is several million bucks richer now and he wants to party. So move it.’

‘But I want to get pissed with this lot.’ Lysander gazed wistfully at Astrid.

‘Lysander,’ said Seb wearily, ‘you want to play polo for a living. If you’re prepared to be charming and diplomatic, you can brownnose your way into riding some of the most fabulous horses in the world, but for a start lay off Elmer’s wife and his grooms.’

‘He sure is the cutest guy,’ sighed Astrid as Lysander was dragged protesting away.

2

The party was held in one of the soft brown houses clustering round the polo field. Male guests ranged from lithe, bronzed, professional polo players of all nationalities to rich businessmen, some of them patrons, some of who merely liked to be part of the polo scene. The women included glamorous groupies of all ages, wearing everything from T-shirts and jeans to strapless dresses showing off massive jewels.

The feeling of jungle warfare was intensified by the forest of glossy green tropical plants in every room and by the fact that all the professionals were on the prowl for rich patrons, and the patrons, despite having wives present, were stalking the prettiest groupies who were, in turn, hunting anything in trousers.

Loud cheers greeted the arrival of the Safus team.

'If you have oats, prepare to sow them now,' murmured Seb as the cheering died away and a hush fell over the room.

'Talk about Elmer's angels,' drawled a predatory blonde in a fire-engine-red dress licking her scarlet lips.

Elmer, mean little eyes flickering with rage, was the only person who didn't laugh. He'd kept on his brown boots and white breeches which the game had hardly marked, so that everyone should know he was a polo player, but had changed into a clean blue Safus polo shirt. As groupies started edging through the vegetation towards the rest of his team, Elmer, competitive as ever, was determined to annex the prettiest. Soon he was bosom to pectorals with a mettlesome brunette called Bonny whose bottom lip

protruded more than any of the scented orchids massed in the centre of the living room, and whose buttocks swelled out of the briefest white shorts like an inverted Nell Gwyn.

Refusing to admit how blind he was without glasses, Elmer had to peer very closely to see the logo on her jutting orange T-shirt.

'If you can read this,' he spelled out slowly, then peering even closer, *'You're a dirty old man.'*

Bonny shrieked with laughter. Reluctantly Elmer decided to join in. *'That's kinda neat.'*

'Yours is neater,' said Bonny. *'That deep blue is just great with your eyes. Has anyone told you how like Richard Gere you are? I'd give anything for a Safus T-shirt.'*

'Swappyer then,' said Elmer.

'He'd never have stripped off in public,' muttered Seb, *'if he hadn't got a Barbados suntan and just lost ten pounds, none of it admittedly off his ego, on a pre-season crash diet. Jeees-us.'* He choked on his drink as Bonny's head disappeared into the orange T-shirt and her upstretched wriggling arms showed off a pair of magnificent brown breasts.

Elmer's eyes were popping like a garrotted Pekinese. The orange T-shirt, once he had wriggled into it, clashed with his port-wine face but in no way doused his lust.

'I see your picture every time I pick up the Wall Street Journal,' Bonny was now telling him. *'But you are so much cuter in the flesh.'*

'The flesh is weak where lovely young women like you are concerned,' said Elmer thickly.

The logo on Lysander's faded grey T-shirt read:

Sex is evil,

Evil is sin,

Sin's forgiven

So get stuck in.

He was getting drunker by the minute and had now been

cornered by two stunning but interchangeable suntanned blondes.

‘Did you fly commercial?’ asked the first.

Lysander looked blank.

‘She’s trying to figure if you came over by private jet, preferably your own,’ explained the second.

‘Oh, right,’ said Lysander. ‘No, I flew Virgin. The air hostesses were really sweet.’

‘Surprised they were still intacta with you on board,’ said the first.

Glancing round for a waitress with a bottle, Lysander caught sight of Martha Winterton. Shaded by a vast yucca, she was chatting mindlessly to a senator’s wife and trying not to watch Elmer. Her desolation was tangible.

‘You’re not really a good friend of George Bush?’ Bonny was growing more raucous. ‘I would just love to meet him.’

‘It could be arranged.’ Elmer’s pudgy right hand was surreptitiously stroking her left buttock as they leant side by side against a dragged yellow wall.

The senator’s wife had drifted off to talk to Butch Murdoch. Martha was gazing despairingly into her empty glass. Oblivious of Seb’s stern warning that trespassers would be put on the next plane, Lysander crossed the room.

‘Have you dried off?’

Martha jumped. Her huge eyes, the clear brown of Tio Pepe held up to the light, were swimming with tears. It was a second before she recognized him.

‘Oh sure – it was so dear of you to bring me that blanket.’

She had a husky, hesitant voice. Her creased white shirt still clung to her body. Her dark hair, which had dried all fluffy, was pulled back in a bandeau making her freckled face look even thinner.

‘You needed a lifeboat,’ said Lysander.

‘I could use one now.’

‘Have a drink first.’

As Lysander grabbed a bottle from a passing waitress, Martha noticed a badge saying: 'Birthday Boy' pinned to his grey T-shirt. Clutching her glass of champagne as though it was boiling tea and she a shipwreck victim, she took a great gulp.

'There's a nice fire in the garden,' said Lysander seeing the goose-flesh on her thin freckled arms.

Outside, the dull aquamarine of the swimming-pool reflected a few faint stars. Rain had bowed down the hibiscus and the oleander bushes, but their flowers, pink, red, amethyst and yellow, glistened jewel-like in the flood-lighting. Great drenched pelts of purple and magenta bougainvillea clung to the house and the garden fences.

To an almost overpowering scent of orange and lemon blossom was added a tempting smell of roast pork, garlic and rosemary as half a dozen sucking pigs jerked above the glowing coals of the barbecue. Apart from an inscrutable Mexican houseboy who occasionally plunged a skewer into their shining gold sides, the place was deserted.

Caressed by the warm night air Lysander gave a sigh of pure joy.

'Such bliss to go outside and not shiver, but I expect it's cold for you.' Solicitously, he edged her towards the fire.

'Poor little things,' Martha looked sadly at the sucking pigs, then, pulling herself together, 'You're kinda tanned for someone just arrived from England.'

'It's fake,' confessed Lysander, lifting the light brown hair flopping over his forehead. 'Look how it's streaked on the hairline and turned my eyebrows orange. I borrowed the stuff from Dolly, my girlfriend. She's a model and always having to turn herself strange colours. I wanted to terrorize everyone into thinking I'd got brown playing in Argentina all winter. But I was pissed when I put it on last night.'

She's so sweet when she smiles, he thought. To hell with Seb and Dommie.

'And it's your birthday?' she asked.

'No,' Lysander glanced down at his birthday-boy badge, 'but it gets me lots of free drinks.' He opened his blue-green eyes very wide and then roared with such infectious laughter that people standing in doorways and sitting in windows and even the inscrutable Mexican houseboy looked up and smiled.

'When is your birthday?' asked Martha.

'25 February, I shall be twenty-three.'

'You're a Pisces.'

Lysander nodded. 'Friendly, warm, considerate, easy-going, but cross me and you'll see how tough I can be. My father who's a classical scholar pronounces it, "Piss-ces".'

'What does your daddy do?'

'He's a headmaster. Supposed to be a great teacher, but he spends most of his time raising funds and wowing mothers.'

'Does your mother wow the fathers?'

For a second an expression of utter anguish spilled over the boy's sunny, innocent, charming face. Shutting his eyes he took a couple of deep breaths as though trying to survive some horrific torture without crying out.

'She just died,' he mumbled, 'last October.'

'Ohmigod!' Martha put a hand on his arm which was clenched like cast iron, 'Whatever happened?'

'She had a fall on the road. The horse went up. She wasn't wearing a hard hat.'

As the Mexican plunged in another skewer the boiling fat dripped on to the red coals which hissed and flared up, lighting Lysander's face like a soul in hell.

'You poor little guy,' said Martha. 'Were you very close?'

Lysander nodded. 'She was more like my sister. All my friends were in love with her.'

'Your father must have been devastated.'

Lysander's face hardened. 'Dad doesn't show his feelings. Basically we don't talk. He prefers my brothers, Hector and Alexander. They're better at things.'

From inside the house the band struck up. 'I get no kick from champagne,' crooned a mellow tenor.

'I do,' said Lysander, emptying the bottle into Martha's glass.

'What d'you do?' asked Martha.

'Estate agent.'

'Not much fun with the recession.'

'Best thing that ever happened to him.'

Gliding up, Seb Carlisle topped up both their glasses. 'Recession enables Rip-Off Van Winkle here to sleep and sober up all day in the office when he's not ringing Ladbroke's or sloping off home to watch *Neighbours*. He couldn't do any of that if he had to sell houses.'

'Oh shut up, Seb,' said Lysander. 'Now guard Martha for a minute.'

Turning, he was nearly sent flying by the predatory blonde in the fire-engine-red dress.

'If you've finished with your toy boy,' she said pointedly to Martha, 'I'd love to dance with him.'

'You're sweet,' said Lysander, 'but I must have a slash.'

'He's just adorable.' Martha watched Lysander drifting gracefully as smoke across the lawn.

'Isn't he?' agreed Seb. 'Unfortunately his boss put him on commission only and as he's not selling any houses he's running up terrible debts, betting and going out clubbing every night.'

'He ought to do something else.'

'He's about to go to a new job working in the City for some merchant bank which specializes in pretty, personable young men; but he'll never last. He's not cut out for the City. He ought to be a jump jockey or a polo player. You saw what a beautiful horseman he was this afternoon, but it took him four chukkas to get his act together.'

'He's very upset about his mother.'

'Devastated,' agreed Seb. 'Completely lost his base, drinking himself stupid; can't settle to anything. Unlike

his pompous achieving brothers, he's pretty dyslexic and he left school without an O level. His mother spoilt him rotten – the worse the prank the more she laughed, but she always bailed him out when he ran out of money. Pity Elmer can't sign him up for the whole season. Pedro Cavanali broke his leg falling on the boards this afternoon. He plays medium goal with Elmer.'

'I'll see what I can do,' said Martha.

The Mexican had carved two of the sucking pigs. Maids were carrying bowls of salad and baked potatoes through to the dining room as Lysander bounded through the french windows brandishing another bottle.

'Clear the lawn for ballet,' he shouted, then standing on one leg executed a pirouette, spilling a lot of champagne and only just avoided collapsing on the grass.

'You need an early night,' said Seb pointedly.

Inside the house, Lysander could see Elmer bending over Bonny, playing with the ends of her hair, no doubt boasting that Mrs Ex's equine ancestors had come over in the *Mayflower*.

'I'll stick around,' said Lysander.

'Well, at least behave yourself,' warned Seb.

'Some hope,' said Dommie, who wandered over tearing the flesh off the leg of a sucking pig with very white teeth. 'Grub's up. It's very good, although,' he dropped his voice so only Seb could hear, 'our patron seems to have started already. He's eating that slag alive.'

Going towards the house, Martha caught sight of Elmer and went into reverse.

'That Bonny's a bucket,' said Lysander in outrage. 'You're much, much prettier.'

'She's newer.' Martha took out a cigarette with a trembling hand. 'Have you got a light?'

Lysander hadn't, but, before Martha could stop him he'd plunged a twenty-dollar bill into the coals of the barbecue.

'You're crazy but awful sweet,' reproached Martha, as he almost burnt his fingers getting the charred paper to

her cigarette in time, but she was too immersed in her own misery.

'It's my fault,' she confessed. 'My last husband was faithful and dull and I was bored out of my skull, so I ran off with Elmer, who had a roving eye and I haven't slept since.'

'Elmer's a shit,' said Lysander with such disapproval that Martha looked up. 'Dad was a shit to my mother and he's already found someone else, a Mrs Colman, an army widow. She's got veiny ankles and wears shirts with pie-frill collars,' he went on in disgust. 'The boys call her "Mustard" because she's so keen on Dad. She helps him fund-raise. They're turning the stables where Mum kept her horses into a new music school.'

'The speed with which Mrs Ex carted you this afternoon,' said Martha bitterly, 'is only equalled by the haste with which men shack up if they're divorced or widowed, or bored with their wives. Oh God, no!'

Following her gaze, Lysander saw Bonny run off shrieking excitedly into the wet depths of the shrubbery followed by Elmer.

'Could you bear to take me home?'

'Oh wow, that's like offering me a ride in the National,' said Lysander. 'Could I bear? I certainly could.' Then, seeing Seb beadily advancing on them with two platefuls of food, 'Look, I don't want the twins getting heavy. Let's escape through the garden.'